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ADDRESS
OF
PRESIDENT WILSON
AT THE
FIFTIETH
ANNIVERSARY DINNER
OF THE
MANHATTAN CLUB

(BILTMORE HOTEL)
NEW YORK CITY
NOVEMBER 4, 1915



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ADDRESS.

MR. TOASTMASTER AND GENTLEMEN:

I warmly felicitate the club upon the completion of fifty years of successful and interesting life. Club life may be made to mean a great deal to those who know how to use it. I have no doubt that to a great many of you has come genuine stimulation in the associations of this place and that as the years have multiplied you have seen more and more the useful ends which may be served by organizations of this sort.

But I have not come to speak wholly of that, for there are others of your own members who can speak of the club with a knowledge and an intelligence which no one can have who has not been intimately associated with it. Men band themselves together for the sake of the association no doubt, but also for something greater and deeper than that,—because they are conscious of common interests lying outside their business occupations, because they are members of the same community and in frequent intercourse find mutual stimulation and a real maximum of vitality and power. I shall assume that here around the dinner table on this memorable occasion our talk should properly turn to the wide and common interests which are most in our thoughts, whether they be the interests of the community or of the nation.

A year and a half ago our thought would have been almost altogether of great domestic questions. They are many and of vital consequence. We must and shall address ourselves to their solution with diligence, firmness, and self-possession, notwithstanding we find ourselves in the midst of a world disturbed by great disaster and ablaze with terrible war; but our thought is now inevitably of new things about which formerly we gave ourselves little concern. We are thinking now chiefly of our relations with the rest of the world,—not our commercial relations,—about those we have thought and planned always,—but about our political relations, our duties as an individual and independent force in the world to ourselves, our neighbors, and the world itself.

Our principles are well known. It is not necessary to avow them again. We believe in political liberty and founded our great government to obtain it, the liberty of men and of peoples,—of men to choose their own lives and of peoples to choose their own allegiance.

Our ambition, also, all the world has knowledge of. It is not only to be free and prosperous ourselves, but also to be the friend and thoughtful partisan of those who are free or who desire freedom the world over. If we have had aggressive purposes and covetous ambitions, they were the fruit of our thoughtless youth as a nation and we have put them aside. We shall, I confidently believe, never again take another foot of territory by conquest. We shall never in any circumstances seek to make an independent people subject to our dominion; because we believe, we passionately believe, in the right of every people to choose their own allegiance and be free of masters altogether. For ourselves we wish nothing but the full liberty of self-development; and with ourselves in this great matter we associate all the peoples of our own hemisphere. We wish not only for the United States but for them the fullest freedom of independent growth and of action, for we know that throughout this hemisphere the same aspirations are everywhere being worked out, under diverse conditions but with the same impulse and ultimate object.

All this is very clear to us and will, I confidently predict, become more and more clear to the whole world as the great processes of the future unfold themselves. It is with a full consciousness of such principles and such ambitions that we are asking ourselves at the present time what our duty is with regard to the armed force of the Nation. Within a year we have witnessed what we did not believe possible, a great European conflict involving many of the greatest nations of the world. The influences of a great war are everywhere in the air. All Europe is embattled. Force everywhere speaks out with a loud and imperious voice in a titanic struggle of governments, and from one end of our own dear country to the other men are asking one another what our own force is, how far we are prepared to maintain ourselves against any interference with our national action or development.

In no man's mind, I am sure, is there even raised the question of the wilful use of force on our part against any nation or any people. No matter what military or naval force the United States might develop, statesmen throughout the whole world might rest assured that we were gathering that force, not for attack in any quarter, not for aggression of any kind, not for the satisfaction of any political or international ambition, but merely to make sure of our own security. We have it in mind to be prepared, not for war, but only for defense; and with the thought constantly in our minds that the principles we hold most dear can be achieved by the slow processes of history only in the kindly and wholesome atmosphere of peace, and not by the use of hostile force. The mission of America in the world is essentially a mission of peace and good will among men. She has become the home and asylum of men of all creeds and races. Within

her hospitable borders they have found homes and congenial associations and freedom and a wide and cordial welcome, and they have become part of the bone and sinew and spirit of America itself. America has been made up out of the nations of the world and is the friend of the nations of the world.

But we feel justified in preparing ourselves to vindicate our right to independent and unmolested action by making the force that is in us ready for assertion.

And we know that we can do this in a way that will be itself an illustration of the American spirit. In accordance with our American traditions we want and shall work for only an army adequate to the constant and legitimate uses of times of international peace. But we do want to feel that there is a great body of citizens who have received at least the most rudimentary and necessary forms of military training; that they will be ready to form themselves into a fighting force at the call of the nation; and that the nation has the munitions and supplies with which to equip them without delay should it be necessary to call them into action. We wish to supply them with the training they need, and we think we can do so without calling them at any time too long away from their civilian pursuits.

It is with this idea, with this conception, in mind that the plans have been made which it will be my privilege to lay before the Congress at its next session. That plan calls for only such an increase in the regular Army of the United States as experience has proved to be required for the performance of the necessary duties of the Army in the Philippines, in Hawaii, in Porto Rico, upon the borders of the United States, at the coast fortifications, and at the military posts of the interior. For the rest, it calls for the training within the next three years of a force of 400,000 citizen soldiers to be raised in annual contingents of 133,000, who would be asked to enlist for three years with the colors and three years on furlough, but who during their three years of enlistment with the colors would not be organized as a standing force but would be expected merely to undergo intensive training for a very brief period of each year. Their training would take place in immediate association with the organized units of the regular Army. It would have no touch of the amateur about it, neither would it exact of the volunteers more than they could give in any one year from their civilian pursuits.

And none of this would be done in such a way as in the slightest degree to supersede or subordinate our present serviceable and efficient National Guard. On the contrary, the National Guard itself would be used as part of the instrumentality by which training would be given the citizens who enlisted under the new conditions, and I should hope and expect that the legislation by which all this would be accomplished would put the National Guard itself upon

a better and more permanent footing than it has ever been before, giving it not only the recognition which it deserves, but a more definite support from the national government and a more definite connection with the military organization of the nation.

What we all wish to accomplish is that the forces of the nation should indeed be part of the nation and not a separate professional force, and the chief cost of the system would not be in the enlistment or in the training of the men, but in the providing of ample equipment in case it should be necessary to call all forces into the field.

Moreover, it has been American policy time out of mind to look to the Navy as the first and chief line of defense. The Navy of the United States is already a very great and efficient force. Not rapidly, but slowly, with careful attention, our naval force has been developed until the Navy of the United States stands recognized as one of the most efficient and notable of the modern time. All that is needed in order to bring it to a point of extraordinary force and efficiency as compared with the other navies of the world is that we should hasten our pace in the policy we have long been pursuing, and that chief of all we should have a definite policy of development, not made from year to year but looking well into the future and planning for a definite consummation. We can and should profit in all that we do by the experience and example that have been made obvious to us by the military and naval events of the actual present. It is not merely a matter of building battleships and cruisers and submarines, but also a matter of making sure that we shall have the adequate equipment of men and munitions and supplies for the vessels we build and intend to build. Part of our problem is the problem of what I may call the mobilization of the resources of the nation at the proper time if it should ever be necessary to mobilize them for national defense. We shall study efficiency and adequate equipment as carefully as we shall study the number and size of our ships, and I believe that the plans already in part made public by the Navy Department are plans which the whole nation can approve with rational enthusiasm.

No thoughtful man feels any panic haste in this matter. The country is not threatened from any quarter. She stands in friendly relations with all the world. Her resources are known and her self-respect and her capacity to care for her own citizens and her own rights. There is no fear amongst us. Under the new-world conditions we have become thoughtful of the things which all reasonable men consider necessary for security and self-defense on the part of every nation confronted with the great enterprise of human liberty and independence. That is all.

Is the plan we propose sane and reasonable and suited to the needs of the hour? Does it not conform to the ancient traditions of

America? Has any better plan been proposed than this programme that we now place before the country? In it there is no pride of opinion. It represents the best professional and expert judgment of the country. But I am not so much interested in programmes as I am in safeguarding at every cost the good faith and honor of the country. If men differ with me in this vital matter, I shall ask them to make it clear how far and in what way they are interested in making the permanent interests of the country safe against disturbance.

In the fulfillment of the programme I propose I shall ask for the hearty support of the country, of the rank and file of America, of men of all shades of political opinion. For my position in this important matter is different from that of the private individual who is free to speak his own thoughts and to risk his own opinions in this matter. We are here dealing with things that are vital to the life of America itself. In doing this I have tried to purge my heart of all personal and selfish motives. For the time being, I speak as the trustee and guardian of a nation's rights, charged with the duty of speaking for that nation in matters involving her sovereignty,—a nation too big and generous to be exacting and yet courageous enough to defend its rights and the liberties of its people wherever assailed or invaded. I would not feel that I was discharging the solemn obligation I owe the country were I not to speak in terms of the deepest solemnity of the urgency and necessity of preparing ourselves to guard and protect the rights and privileges of our people, our sacred heritage of the fathers who struggled to make us an independent nation.

The only thing within our own borders that has given us grave concern in recent months has been that voices have been raised in America professing to be the voices of Americans which were not indeed and in truth American, but which spoke alien sympathies, which came from men who loved other countries better than they loved America, men who were partisans of other causes than that of America and had forgotten that their chief and only allegiance was to the great government under which they live. These voices have not been many, but they have been very loud and very clamorous. They have proceeded from a few who were bitter and who were grievously misled. America has not opened its doors in vain to men and women out of other nations. The vast majority of those who have come to take advantage of her hospitality have united their spirits with hers as well as their fortunes. These men who speak alien sympathies are not their spokesmen but are the spokesmen of small groups whom it is high time that the nation should call to a reckoning. The chief thing necessary in America in order that she should let all the world know that she is prepared to maintain her own great position is that

the real voice of the nation should sound forth unmistakably and in majestic volume, in the deep unison of a common, unhesitating national feeling. I do not doubt that upon the first occasion, upon the first opportunity, upon the first definite challenge, that voice will speak forth in tones which no man can doubt and with commands which no man dare gainsay or resist.

May I not say, while I am speaking of this, that there is another danger that we should guard against? We should rebuke not only manifestations of racial feeling here in America where there should be none, but also every manifestation of religious and sectarian antagonism. It does not become America that within her borders, where every man is free to follow the dictates of his conscience and worship God as he pleases, men should raise the cry of church against church. To do that is to strike at the very spirit and heart of America. We are a God-fearing people. We agree to differ about methods of worship, but we are united in believing in Divine Providence and in worshipping the God of Nations. We are the champions of religious right here and everywhere that it may be our privilege to give it our countenance and support. The government is conscious of the obligation and the nation is conscious of the obligation. Let no man create divisions where there are none.

Here is the nation God has builded by our hands. What shall we do with it? Who is there who does not stand ready at all times to act in her behalf in a spirit of devoted and disinterested patriotism? We are yet only in the youth and first consciousness of our power. The day of our country's life is still but in its fresh morning. Let us lift our eyes to the great tracts of life yet to be conquered in the interests of righteous peace. Come, let us renew our allegiance to America, conserve her strength in its purity, make her chief among those who serve mankind, self-reverenced, self-commanded, mistress of all forces of quiet counsel, strong above all others in good will and the might of invincible justice and right.



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